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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. A membrane structure comprising a silicon film having a
2 grain structure including grains defining pores therebetween.
3
- 4 2. A membrane structure comprising a silicon film including
5 grains having gaps formed therebetween to define individual
6 pores, the maximum cross-sectional dimension of any one grain
7 approximately equal to the thickness of the film.
8
- 9 3. The structure of claim 2 wherein a lateral dimension of
10 any pore is less than that of any grain.
11
- 12 4. The structure of claim 2 wherein a lateral dimension of
13 the pores is between about 10 and 50 nanometers.
14
- 15 5. The structure of claim 2 wherein the thickness of the
16 film is less than or equal to about 150 nanometers.
17
- 18 6. The structure of claim 2 wherein the thickness of the
19 film is between about 50 and 150 nanometers.
20
- 21 7. The structure of claim 2 wherein the roughness of the
22 film is approximately equal to its thickness.
23
- 24 8. The structure of claim 2 wherein the film forms a filter.
25
- 26 9. The structure of claim 2 wherein the film is conformal to
27 an underlying surface.
28

10. The structure of claim 2 further including a structural layer to support the film.

11. The structure of claim 2 further including a conformal layer formed on the film to provide a selected chemical or biological function.

12. A membrane filter structure comprising a silicon film having a grain structure including grains defining pores therebetween, a lateral dimension of the pores being between about 10 and 50 nanometers and the maximum diameter of any one grain not exceeding the thickness of the film.

13. A method of fabricating a membrane structure comprising:
forming a sacrificial layer over a first surface of a substrate;
forming a silicon layer over the sacrificial layer such that the silicon layer has a grain structure including grains defining pores therebetween wherein the maximum diameter of any one grain does not exceed the thickness of the membrane structure; and
removing the sacrificial layer.

14. The method of claim 13 further including forming a passageway through the substrate.

15. The method of claim 13 further including forming a conformal layer over the silicon layer to provide a selected chemical or biological function.

16. A method of fabricating a membrane structure comprising:

forming a sacrificial layer over a surface of a substrate;
forming a structural layer over the sacrificial layer;
forming a silicon layer over the structural layer such that the silicon layer has a grain structure including grains defining pores therebetween wherein the maximum diameter of any one grain does not exceed the thickness of the membrane structure; and
removing the sacrificial layer.

17. A method of fabricating a membrane filter structure comprising:

forming a sacrificial layer over a first surface of a substrate;
growing a silicon film over the sacrificial layer at a temperature near the tensile-to-compressive transition temperature of the silicon film such that the silicon film has a grain structure including grains defining pores therebetween wherein the maximum diameter of any one grain does not exceed the thickness of the membrane filter structure; and
removing the sacrificial layer

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the silicon film is formed under a near zero-stress condition.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein the silicon film has a residual stress within a range of about -50 to 50 mega-Pascals.

20. The method of claim 17 wherein the silicon film has a residual stress within a range of about -100 to 100 mega-Pascals.

21. The method of claim 17 wherein the silicon film is grown such that a lateral dimension of any pore is less than that of any grain.

22. The method of claim 17 wherein the silicon film is grown such that a lateral dimension of the pores is between about 10 and 50 nanometers.

23. The method of claim 17 wherein the silicon film is grown such that the thickness of the film is between about 50 and 150 nanometers.

24. The method of claim 17 wherein the silicon film is grown such that the roughness of the film is approximately equal to its thickness.

25. The method of claim 17 further including forming a conformal layer on the silicon film to provide a selected chemical or biological function.

26. The method of claim 17 further including monitoring the residual stress of the silicon film.